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ABSTRACT

This paper delineates the organizational structure and operational procedures of the Michigan Institute for Educational Management (MIEM) Assessment Center Program for prospective school principals and assistant principals. The program is part of the Assessment Center Project of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). The primary program purposes are to improve leadership quality at the school building level and to promote improved training programs for principals. The center diagnoses each candidate's strengths and weaknesses in 12 skill dimensions required for effective principal performance by observing simulated activities and through personal interviews. Assessment results are reported to the candidates and the sponsoring school districts. Twelve school districts' candidates meeting eligibility requirements are selected for each assessment session. The Assessment Center program is directed by the Assessment Center Director and the Coordinating Council. Program implementation involves the partnership of the NASSP, the Michigan Department of Education, MIEM, public school districts and educational consortia. Assessors are carefully selected and trained. Report security, assessment materials, program monitoring, schedule, location, operational documents, and program evaluation are also discussed. (BS)

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THE MICHIGAN INSTITUTE for EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT CENTER PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

This brochure delineates the organizational structure and operational procedures describing the Michigan Institute for Educational Management Assessment Center Program for prospective school principals and assistant principals. The Michigan Institute for Educational Management is a participating organization in the Assessment Center Project conducted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). The Assessment Center is administered by a Coordinating Council whose membership represents the Michigan Department of Education (MDE), the Michigan Association of School Administrators (MASA), the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP), the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association (MEMSPA), the Michigan School Business Officials (MSBO), Intermediate School Districts (ISD), universities, and participating school districts. Grant monies for the pilot year were secured from the Michigan Department of Education for distribution through the Michigan Institute for Educational Management.

The Michigan Institute for Educational Management (MIEM) Assessment Center Program will operate in cooperation with Michigan public school districts, the educational consortia, and institutions of higher education that train school administrators within the limitations set forth by the NASSP.

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PURPOSE

The primary purpose of the MIEM Assessment Center Program is to improve the quality of leadership at the school building level through more objective selection procedures and a clinical approach to professional development. A secondary purpose will be to promote improved training programs available to prospective and practicing school administrators in Michigan.

The program will assist school districts in identifying individuals with potential for success in the principalship and assistant principalship by:

1. Diagnosing each candidate's strengths and weaknesses in twelve skill dimensions required for effective performance in the principalship (problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, sensitivity, stress tolerance, oral and written communication, personal motivation, range of interests and educational values).
2. Providing the school district leadership an objective assessment of each participant's strengths and weaknesses in the aforementioned twelve skill dimensions.

The program will contribute to the improved professional development of prospective school principals by:

1. Providing candidates a more accurate assessment of their potential as well as their personal/professional development needs.
2. Providing the school district leadership information to use in planning professional growth activities.
3. Providing the Department of Education, universities, intermediate service agencies and administrative associations with valuable data to be used in developing state and regional level training initiatives for prospective principals.

THE PROCESS

SIMULATED ACTIVITIES

The process requires that each participant function in simulated activities representative of the principalship. These exercises include: (1) leaderless group activities (2) fact-finding and stress exercises and (3) paper-and-pencil "in-basket" tasks dealing with typical school problems. In addition, an extensive structured personal interview is an integral part of the assessment process.

OBSERVATIONS

While completing the assessment exercises, each participant is observed by a group of assessors who are trained under strict standards established by NASSP. Twelve participants are observed for two days by a team of six assessors who record behavior relating to the selected skill dimensions.

SKILL DIMENSIONS ASSESSED

1. Problem Analysis - Ability to seek out relevant data and analyze complex information to determine the important elements of a problem situation searching for information with a purpose.
2. Judgment - Skill in identifying educational needs and setting priorties; ability to reach logical conclusions and make high-quality decisions based on available information; ability to critically evaluate written communications.
3. Organizational Ability - Ability to plan, schedule and control the work of others; skill in using resources in an optimal fashion; ability to deal with a volume of paperwork and heavy demands on one's time.
4. Decisiveness - Ability to recognize when a decision is required and to act quickly (without an assessment of the quality of the decision).

5. Leadership - Ability to recognize when a group requires direction, to get others involved in solving problems, to effectively interact with a group, to guide them to the accomplishment of a task.

6. Sensitivity - Ability to perceive the needs, concerns, and personal problems of others; tact in dealing with persons from different backgrounds; skill in resolving conflicts, ability to deal effectively with people concerning emotional issues; knowing what information to communicate and to whom.

7. Oral Communication Skill - Ability to make a clear oral presentation of ideas and facts.

8. Written Communication Skill - Ability to express ideas clearly in writing; to write appropriately for different audiences -- students, teachers, parents, other administrators.

9. Range of Interest - Competence to discuss a variety of subjects (educational, political, economic, etc.); desire to actively participate in events.

10. Personal Motivation - Showing that work is important to personal satisfaction; a need to achieve in all activities attempted; ability to be self-policing.

11. Educational Values - Possession of well-reasoned educational philosophy; receptiveness to change and new ideas.

12. Stress Tolerance - Ability to perform under pressure and opposition; ability to think on one's feet.

CONSENSUS

Using behavioral data collected during the first two days, the team of assessors spends three full days and evenings classifying, describing, and discussing the behavior and skills of the twelve participants. The assessor team, under the leadership of a center director, then reaches consensus regarding the performance of each participant in each of the twelve dimensions.

FINAL REPORT

Finally, a comprehensive assessment report is prepared describing strengths, improvement needs, developmental suggestions and the participant's overall performance in the center. This final report is discussed with each participant during a feedback session. This report is also mailed to the sponsoring school district within thirty days after the assessment.

PARTICIPANT ELIGIBILITY AND SELECTION

MINIMUM ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The Assessment Center Program is designed to assist public school districts in the selection and training of candidates for school-level administrative positions. Therefore, school district superintendents are expected to commit their top candidates for principalships and assistant principalships to participate in the program. Appropriate participants are teachers, assistant principals and district-level personnel who are prepared for, and highly motivated towards, building-level administrative assignments. The following minimum eligibility criteria are MANDATORY for all participants for the MIEMAC Program.

1. Possession of graduate work or some administration experiences, other than principalships.
2. Recommendation of the school district superintendent or supervisor.
3. Signed agreement by the participant to respect the copyright and confidentiality of the Assessment Center process and materials.

4. Commitment by the school district administration that the participant will attend in-service or professional development training programs designed to address skill deficiencies identified in the assessment center process.

In the final selection of participants for the Assessment Center Program, superintendents may wish to consider the following factors:

1. Present and future need for administrators.
2. Educational training and experience.
3. Employment tenure in the district.
4. Performance to date.
5. District need for female and minority administrators.
6. District use of assessment center data in its administrative selection process.
7. Employee's participation in the district's leadership development program, if applicable.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Criteria for the selection of participants in the Assessment Center Program will be developed by the Institute in consultation with the organizations and the NASSP. The Coordinating Council staff will screen applications for each assessment center session and award twelve slots to participating school districts that have submitted eligible candidates.

In awarding participation slots, consideration will be given to each district's need to fill administrative vacancies and other factors such as race, sex, geographical location and school organizational level. Ultimately, the selection of each participant will be made by the school district leadership from their approved list of eligible candidates.

REASSESSMENT OF CANDIDATES

NASSP recommends that no participant be reassessed within a period of two years. The selection criteria of the Assessment Center Program will require candidates for reassessment to demonstrate that they have received additional training and/or experience designed to improve skill performance. The selection of participants for reassessment will be considered on a space-available basis.

NEUTRALITY IN PERSONNEL SELECTION PROCESS

No specific career recommendations will be made by staff in the Assessment Center Program. Staff will provide participants and their school district leadership with a diagnosis of strengths and a statement of developmental needs.

Career decisions will be made by participants themselves and by superintendents and boards of education who use the information developed through the Assessment Center Program in selecting new principals and assistant principals.

ORGANIZATION

ADMINISTRATION

The Assessment Center Program is administered by the Michigan Institute for Educational Management and will be under the direction of the Assessment Center Director and the Coordinating Council. The actual implementation of the Assessment Center Program involves a partnership approach among NASSP, MDE, Michigan public school districts, MASA, MASSP, MSBO, MEMSPA and Michigan institutions of higher education that train prospective principals and assistant principals.

PARTNERSHIP OPERATION

The organizations represented in the partnership operation of the Assessment Center Program are involved as follows:

1. The National Association of Secondary School Principals
   a. Officially sanctions, evaluates and accredits the Michigan Assessment Center Program.
   b. Provides, at cost, materials, assessor training and consultative assistance required to implement and operate the program.
   c. Provides spot monitoring to the project.
2. The Michigan Department of Education
   a. Supports and cooperates with the Assessment Center concept.
   b. Underwrites the implementation costs of the program.
3. MIEM (through the Coordinating Council)
   a. Coordinates the development, implementation and operation of the program with NASSP, MDE, public school districts, educational consortia and high education institutions.
   b. Defines the scope of the Assessment Center Program activities.
   c. Serves as fiscal agent.
   d. Plans and organizes the operation of the program.
   e. Provides a director for the program.
   f. Approves dates and locations of centers.
   g. Seeks financial support as necessary to cover operational costs.
   h. Ensures that all phases of the Assessment Center Program operation meet NASSP's "Standards of Quality."
   i. Guides the evaluation of the program design and implementation.

j. Selects and maintains a cadre of qualified assessors.

k. Actively promotes the Assessment Center to other education associations.

l. Publicizes the role of the project and seek support for it.

m. Communicates and coordinates the Program with the educational community in Michigan.

4. Public School Districts

a. Send participants being considered for the principalship and assistant principalship to undergo the assessment center process and absorb the costs of NASSP materials (approx. $46 per participant), travel and substinence expenses for each participant including an initial fee of $250. (1st year assessor districts - $150)

b. Use Assessment Center Program data according to prescribed ethical standards.

c. Designate a staff member(s) to undergo training as an accredited assessor and allow release time for training (four days).

d. Underwrite the costs of training the staff member(s) as an assessor (travel, subsistence and a $500 fee).

e. Contribute five to ten working days of each staff member's time to yearly assessment duty.

5. Educational Consortia (ISD, universities, associations)

a. Provide technical assistance in a consultative role.

b. Cooperatively sponsor training and research activities designed to improve educational leadership in Michigan.

ASSESSMENT CENTER DIRECTOR

The program director is appointed by MIEM in consultation with the cooperating organizations and the NASSP. The director is a trained assessor with excellent skills and a high energy level and has served as an assessor in an accredited assessment center session. The director is responsible for the overall quality control of the program. The director's responsiblities, among others, include the following:

1. Organization and operation of each assessment center session.
2. Coordination and consultation with public school districts.
3. Maintenance of assessment center records for each participant.
4. Evaluation of the Assessment Center Program in terms of program objectives.
5. Review and approval of reports on each participant.
6. Coordinate or conduct feedback interviews with participants.
7. Development and maintenance of a cadre of assessors.
8. Adherence to NASSP "Standards of Quality" to ensure annual accreditation.
9. Coordination with the NASSP, the Institute and the Michigan Department of Education.

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSOR TRAINING

Assessors must be selected with great care. Training is an expensive, demanding process that requires long hours and intense concentration. Although assessor training often improves administrative skills, it is not intended to be an inservice tool for administrators. The purpose of training is to prepare a cadre of highly qualified assessors who will provide an objective and independent assessment of candidates for the principalship and assistant principalship. The criteria for the selection of candidates for assessor training will be developed by the Institute in consulation with NASSP. Priority will be given to candidates who have successful work experience as a school principal or district-level supervisor. All assessor training candidates will be screened and approved by NASSP.

All assessors used in the program will be trained by NASSP personnel (or those officially designated by the Association) and the Division of Industrial and Organizatioal Psychology of the American Psychological Association. These assessors will be certified by the trainer as having performed at an acceptable level of competence in specific assessment tasks.

A one-day refresher course will be given by the Assessment Center Program Director to all previously-trained assessors who have been inactive in the program for a period of six months or more. This course will follow an outline of topics and procedures approved by NASSP.

QUALIFICATIONS

1. Successful experience as a principal or a district-level employee in a supervisory role over principals.
2. Possession of a valid NASSP certificate or whose performance is recognized, valued and recommended by school district superintendent.
3. Authorization to participate by the school district superintendent or the appropriate supervisor in an institution of higher education or educational consortia.
4. Interest in working as an assessor and completion of the formal Application for Assessor Training.
5. A high degree of competency in each of the skill areas assessed by the National Assessment Center Project as determined by the district superintendent or appropriate supervisor.
6. A high energy level and the willingness to work intensively for 60-70 hours during a five day period.
7. Excellent observation skills.

All assessors used in the program will be trained by NASSP personnel (or those officially designated by the Association) and the Division of Industrial and Organizational Psychology of the American Psychological Association. These assessors will be certified by the trainer as having performed at an acceptable level of competence in specific assessment tasks.

A one-day refresher course will be given by the Assessment Center Program Director to all previously-trained assessors who have been inactive in the program for a period of six months or more. This course will follow an outline of topics and procedures approved by NASSP.

QUALIFICATIONS

1. Successful experience as a principal or a district-level employee in a supervisory role over principals.
2. Possession of a valid MASSP certificate or whose performance is recognized, valued and recommended by school district superintendent.
3. Authorization to participate by the school district superintendent or the appropriate supervisor in an institution of higher education or educational consortia.
4. Interest in working as an assessor and completion of the formal Application for Assessor Training.
5. A high degree of competency in each of the skill areas assessed by the National Assessment Center Project as determined by the district superintendent or appropriate supervisor.
6. A high energy level and the willingness to work intensively for 60-70 hours during a five day period.
7. Excellent observation skills.

COMMITMENTS

1. Commitment to undergo training (four days) by NASSP personnel (or those officially designated by NASSP) using training procedures and materials developed by NASSP and the Division of Industrial and Organizational Psychology Association. Assessors will be certified by the trainer as having performed at an acceptable level of competence in specific assessment tasks.
2. Commitment to serve as an assessor in a maximum of two five-day assessment center sessions (ten days) each year.
3. Commitment to undergo a one-day refresher training course by the Assessment Center if six months have elapsed since last participation in an accredited assessment center session. This course will follow an outline of topics and procedures approved by the NASSP.
4. Commitment to abide by the ethical standards of quality established by the NASSP in any use of the materials, processes and skills of the NASSP Assessment Center Project. Commitment to honor the copyright and confidentiality of the NASSP Assessment Center process and materials.

RESTRICTIONS AND USES OF ASSESSMENT CENTER DATA

Three copies of each participant's assessment center report will be prepared -- one for the participant, one for the school district leadership and one for the Institute's files. All Assessment Center Program files will be maintained in a secure place. Additional copies will be distributed only after written authorization by the participants. The security of assessment center data will be a priority program objective; only the program center director or other designated authority will have access to the files containing individual assessment reports.

For counseling and research purposes, individual assessment center reports will be maintained for seven years following completion of an assessment center session.

MATERIALS

The Assessment Center will purchase from NASSP all specially prepared and/or copyrighted materials used in the NASSP Assessment Center Project. Neither the State Department of Education nor any other organization participating in this Assessment Center Program will reproduce, copy or duplicate any documents or materials used in the NASSP Assessment Center Project for distribution and/or sales to anyone outside of the official NASSP Assessment Center Project without the express and official written permission of NASSP. The Assessment Center Project will be reimbursed for costs of materials for each participant by the sponsoring school district or agency.

INITIAL YEAR MONITORING

During the initial year, the first two assessment center sessions will be monitored by NASSP officials or other designees. The cost of these monitoring visits will be borne by the Michigan Assessment Center Project.

SCHEDULE

During its initial year, the Assessment Center Project will operate three assessment center sessions and assess 36 participants. Future training and assessment schedules will be arranged after an evaluation of the pilot year activities. These schedules will be released to all partnership organizations at the beginning of each fiscal year.

LOCATION

The physical location of each assessment center session will conform to the prescribed site, space and design requirements specified by the NASSP. The assessment center experience is carried out in locations where participants are relieved of outside pressures and distractions.

OPERATIONAL DOCUMENTS

The following documents will be used in the operation of Assessment Center program:

1. Guidelines for program operations
2. Guidelines for candidate eligibility and participant selection.
3. Guidelines for assessors.
4. Guidelines for participants.
5. Exercises and activities for assessment center experiences
6. Rating sheets for each activity and overall participant rating forms.
7. Evaluation forms for participants to rate the effectiveness of the assessment center experience.

EVALUATION

The success of the Michigan Assessment Center will be judged through data relative to the statements of purpose described in a previous section of this paper. First, responses from all participants in the process, assessors and assessees, will be used to assess success. Second, feedback from participating districts regarding the utility of the information provided to them will be considered as appropriate data. A third data base will be the number of individuals who have participated as assessees and their relative on-the-job success rate. And finally, a general assessment of the Center can be made through the ongoing interest among individuals desiring to participate and the support of school districts in the state for the Center.